

- So I'm going to dive in today with the second part of the two part lectures on Solzhenitsyn and I'm sure you recall last week, we looked at his biography. The extraordinary life that this guy lived. Not only eight years in the Siberian forced labour camps and then suffering afterwards. Endless surveillance. Even endless arrest. Endless much more than harassment. You know, obviously during the Soviet era. So we looked at his life and we looked at the first, for me, major book of his, "A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich". Today, I'm going to, I'm not going to focus really on his life because we looked at the biography in quite a bit of detail last week. I'm going to focus on two books. And the one is here. The one is that I mentioned last week, "The Gulag Archipelago", which I'm sure many people know. 1974 was the English translation, but he wrote it over 10 years secretly between 58 and 1968. And then the other book, which I'm going to focus on, is "Two Hundred Years Together", which is a book that is not as well known but is a fascinatingly, actually quite phenomenal book on 200 years of Russian-Jewish relationships. And that is a controversial piece of work. And I'm, what I'm going to try and do is tease out some of the highlights because, I mean, it is phenomenal amount of research he did and detailed in so many ways. So I'm going to just identify what I think is the essence of the book and some of the highlights from the book on what he calls the Russian-Jewish relationship over 200 years from 1795 to 1995. First I'm going to look at "The Gulag Archipelago", which is the great, if you like, the magnum opus, one of the great books of the last century, Not only by Solzhenitsyn, but by any writer in my personal opinion. And a huge step forward from the remarkable book "A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich", 62. And then these are some of the other main books. But of course he wrote so many other works of fiction, nonfiction, essays, articles, et cetera. But these are regarded as the main books. Let's not forget. He gets the Nobel Prize in 1970, but is not allowed out of Russia until 74 to actually collect it. And the Russian authorities at the time tried to force the Swedish government to give it to him in the Swedish Embassy in Moscow cuz they didn't want to let him travel. And the Swedish Nobel Prize Committee refused. They demanded that he'd be given the freedom to travel to Sweden to get it. So he had to wait four years to get it.

So we are going to look at, as I say, "The Gulag Archipelago" and "Two Hundred Years Together". Just to remind us very quickly, you know, these are some of the pictures of Solzhenitsyn ageing, you know, through his life. An extraordinary toughness. Extraordinary set of experiences that he went through. And I keep thinking to myself that although he was a devout believer in Marxism, he wasn't, he was a captain in the Russian army in the Second World War. He is decorated for bravery. But let's never forget because of a couple of letters to a few friends in Russia written in 1944 criticising Stalin, and

well the regime's approach to some of the strategies of the war.

Now, there must be millions of soldiers, people working with them and so on, anyway, has to go through the sensors. And because of those few letters, which are a few sentences of, you know, what we would today regard as pretty lukewarm, not even criticism, but insights and observations. Because of that, he was hauled up in front of the NKVD at the time and sentenced to eight years hard labour, Siberian labour camps as a political prisoner because of a couple of letters. So one can imagine a young man who's fighting. He's a captain in the army. He's fighting the Germans, the Nazis, and he is awarded for bravery. And then this happens. So the shock at not only at that young age, but any age, and how his whole life is turned around and how this makes him such a different writer to the Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Turgenev, and all the other great Russian writers of the mid 19th century because none of them rarely had to go through that kind, anything like that experience. Yes, they might have been harassed by the Tsarist police. Surveillance, even imprisonment, harassment, Pushkin, you know, and so on. But they were never, you know, put into a situation like this. So that is a huge difference between him and the others. But he's still nevertheless, imbued with the tradition of those great Russian writers of those times, which he and he identifies, especially with Tolstoy. And he said with Tolstoy as the great prophetic writer and Dostoyevsky with his understanding of human nature. It's those two that in a way he would constantly refer to in his book of, I'd rather call it his memoir, "Invisible Allies", you know, rather than, it's not really an autobiography. Okay. So we remember that because "The Gulag Archipelago" relates directly to that.

And I'm going to go on here just to show one other picture here. We remember Solzhenitsyn at a much later in life. And if I may indulge for a second, 'cause I think this is crucial. This phrase from Octavia Paz. Solzhenitsyn speaks from another tradition. His voice is not modern. It is ancient, yet is a tempered voice. Its ancientness is that of the old Russian Christianity, but is a Christianity that has passed through the central experience of our century, the dehumanisation of the totalitarian concentration camps. In a century of false testimonies, a writer becomes witness to man. It's a, for me it's a, it's this brilliant insight of Paz. A writer in a century of false testimony, lies basically, cuz Solzhenitsyn like Havel and others, would spoke about the role of the lie in an autocratic or totalitarian state. And how powerful the lie must be because it becomes believed, or at least it's feared if one tries to speak out against it. And we know not only in America, but in many parts of the world, the effect of the lie and how important it is. And also Gogol wrote about it. You know, the greater the lie, the bigger better. The more often you repeat it, the better. It's all in Gogol's diaries. The handbook is all there from the first part of the century. In a century of false testimonies, a writer becomes a witness to man, to human

nature, society, and so on. Not only a witness to a specific system, but a witness to what man is capable of. Okay, so to move on to the first book, "The Gulag Archipelago" written, and it's about basically from the beginning of the forced labour prisoner camps in Siberia from 1918. And he covers the entire period from 1918 to 1956. This is such an extraordinary book with so much in it that all I can do is, what, take out what I feel a couple of key points and highlights from the book. Let's also not forget that being part of identifying with Tolstoy and the other great writers of the mid 19th century, he is imbued with a sense of what is Russian identity. Linked to, as the other writers did, linked to the land, linked to nationalism, to the Russian Orthodox Church, to the endless debate, which is absolutely rife in our times between assimilate with Western Europe or separate from Western Europe. And being Jewish, we all can understand this dilemma. You know, the horns of the dilemma of the assimilationist debate in identity politics and in, you know, one's own life of identity. And I think that he understands it completely as the others did. Should Russia westernise more? And identify with the enlightenment, with the democracies, et cetera, human rights, social justice of Western Europe and that tradition of fighting and achieving it? Or should Russia identify more with autocratic Tsarist regime, the empire Slavic people's language? Is there such a difference or isn't there? And how much to take from which and how much to, you know, be isolationist or not isolationist? And I think that dilemma, and I would frame it overall in the assimilationist debate, which we know again, as Jews, only too well. I think is a crucial part of the Russian identity and Solzhenitsyn gets it. And he swings between the two. At times, he harks back almost to a nostalgic, but like Tolstoy, to a nostalgic some sense of, you know, the Tsarist empire. They weren't as bad maybe as the Soviets were, and as the communists were, et cetera. There were some things we can take from it. The land, of course, is crucial. There's such an emphasis on the land in the literature and the identity of nationalism, you know. And when it rises and when it drops. So these are quality in the Russian Orthodox Church, of course, you know, which is seen as very different to the development of the church in Western Europe. All these things feeding in Solzhenitsyn. But the crucial difference, as Octavio Paz says, is that he has gone through eight years of a Siberian forced labour camp, which these others haven't. And that shifts the perspective and makes, I think, makes him so contemporary. And it deepens his writing for me personally. So the other things which he keeps from the Russian writers of the mid 19th century, the great, you know, Russian literary practitioners is, you know, how you do the story together in terms of the aesthetics of the form. How do you write the narrative? How do you write the story? And it's filled with philosophical questions, filled with a constant questioning of this relationship to western Europe and the enlightenment and development of western European culture. The church, nationalism, and so on. So all of this is part of him as well. Just a quick reminder perhaps, you know, we know, and I'm sure William and Trudy have spoken about this much better than me, but it's

important because it does link with Solzhenitsyn and what he becomes, because as he utterly rejects the communist regime, he's searching for an alternative. He partly finds it in the West with democratic, individualist freedom, and liberty. But he despairs with what he calls a kind of spiritual vacuity or emptiness in the West. Bit of an old Keyshae phrase. But, you know, for the times he's writing, we can get it. And he's looking for something. Where to belong and where to locate a Russian identity. And he talks about Peter The Great, of the rapid Westernisation of the upper classes certainly. Nobility had to conform to western models of dress, customs, education. The European calendar was introduced. Russians often, of the nobility, went abroad to study. Foreign languages were learnt. So the absorption of Western culture in the 18th and 19th century was pretty big amongst the small 8-10% of the Russian nobility. Before, of course, the emancipation of the serf begins, 1860. And then by the 19th century, the first language of the nobility is French.

So, just as an example that this is the heritage of language for a writer and cultural shifts and changes, that he as a writer who locates himself not so much as an internationalist, but as a Russian, he has to take this on. So, came, right, beginning with "The Gulag Archipelago". This is an ex, for me, an extraordinary book, as I'm sure many people have read it. It mixes history and politics, autobiography, documentary, philosophical speculation, personal comment, personal experiences, interviews with over 256, if I remember, inmates of other camps over a period, over a number of years. So it's the personal and the political. It's what we would call, I would call a fictionalised history. It's not trying to be accurate to history per se. You know, a list of facts, as it were only. But it's also not fiction. So it's a blurring or in the post-modernist, you know, jargon of our times, an entanglement of ideas between the periphery and the centre, between personal and strictly political or historical facts to become one of the most extraordinary novels of, and I use the word novel because it's not a historical account as in documentary, extraordinary, a novel or book of the 20th century of literature of all literature and inspired many others in many other parts of the world to adopt this approach of fictionalised history. And many writers are influenced by this. He also resurrects, all the ideas are mentioned about the 19th century ideal of the Russian writer because he is imbued with Russianism. In the end, he's not an internationalist. And the writer of the 19th century in Russia saw themselves as secular prophets almost. Sometimes not so secular. But of course, as I mentioned, it's a very different subject matter because he's gone for eight years in the camps. In the end, perhaps he is a brilliant storyteller and a truth teller. Vaclav Havel was often accused of being a truth lover. And it was said in a part nostalgic and part sceptical or cynical way. You know, come on, you know, get realpolitik, get more cynical, get more realistic, you know, once you're president. Yeah, you were dissident, but, you know, put aside some of your ideals. Get real, you know, once you're the president and

so on. So, you know, he's played within this way of being the truth teller. And he did obsess about telling the truth because he wrote so much about the role of the lie in the 20th and then towards the end of the 20th century, the role of the lie in democracies becoming autocracies and the role of the coming out of the totalitarianism of the communist era. 1973, the KGB seized one of only three copies of this book. Only three. KGB find one. How did they find it? They arrested one of his typists and she knew obviously where the typed copy was hidden. And she was arrested. You can imagine what happened to her. And a couple of days after her release, she was found hanged in her apartment. So the typist, they've got to hang. This is the level of obsession to stop us. But there are two other copies available. And as soon as he heard this, because, of course, anybody here had the manuscript risk going into prison for many years and not just a prison, you know, we talk about these, you know, Siberian labour camps. Solzhenitsyn to his credit, an extraordinary courage. When he heard this, he immediately ordered its publication in the West and they would've, the KGB would obviously have known this. And you can imagine the risks that he took. Not only of prison, but far worse. It had been, the remaining two copies had been put on microfilm and smuggled out to his legal representative, a guy called Fritzhe in Zurich for publication. So two copies in microfilm. This sounds like a John Carey movie, I know. With Michael Kane and George Smiley, whatever, you know, we can imagine, you know, this smuggling it out, and you know, all of this in the seventies. Anyways, he then said, once it's published in English in the West and other languages, the royalties for the book must go to help give money to former camp prisoners. Now, that's amazing. Okay, he's won that Nobel Prize, but still all the royalties must go to former prisoners of the Soviet camps. And a secret fund is set up and money is sent around as secretly and as partly successfully as possible. As soon as the Politburo heard about this publication happening through the Zurich connection, they decreed his immediate deportation and he was sent out to Germany and very brunt and the Russians, the KGB did a deal. Anyway, he gets to Germany and so on.

What is the book? The book is an incredibly exhaustive, remarkably detailed account based on his eight years in the camps, other prisoner's story, letters, historical sources. Again, he puts it all together in the postmodern jargon, which would be called a kind of mix and match of all these different narrative genres or literary genres, you know, and blurring or successfully creatively breaking the boundaries between fiction and fact. The first two volumes, cuz of course he wanted to give an account of the terror being perpetrated by the regime, and he wanted to combine all of it in this. The first two volumes described the arrests. How then were they arrested? What happened? How were the convictions, the show trials, et cetera. Or not even a show trial. Just a conviction, you know, over a desk. You know, signing so-called confessions. You know, all the rest we know. But he details, the arrests, he goes into the detail of it, the convictions,

the transport, the imprisonment of the gulag victims from 1918 to 1956. So it's an extraordinary amount of history and material that this guy's covering. And he alternates between a fairly dispassionate historical exposition with riveting and harrowing accounts of personal lives in these Siberian prison camps. Those are the first two volumes. And in the third volume, ready documents, mostly anyway, attempted escapes from the camps or how prisoners try to subvert it from within, whether to get an extra few crumbs of food or whether to try and get a bit of heating or an extra piece of clothing, or an extra sock or shoe or boot, whatever. So he mixes history with his experience. And the idea of testimony becomes so powerful. And this has taken up much later by many other writers. But Solzhenitsyn is really starting it. And this whole idea of testimony, not, I mean, obviously we know from apartheid in South Africa and many other countries, you know, the role of their testimony writing became known. In theatre, they called it verbatim theatre, where you use the actual words of the living people, but it all comes from testimony, literature, and Solzhenitsyn is really one of the great originators in the 20th century of this. Because it's done in a literary way, it's not done, you know, as I say, in a fiction, in a purely factual way.

Okay. I want you to give you an example here. This is a picture of Russia. And I've purposely chosen this of many pictures because I think this image burns into imagination. This is of course a picture of Russia. All the little red dots are the known forced labour camps, which I'm going to call them for the moment. Forced labour camps, where all these people were sent. All over, as you can see. Not only in Siberia, but everywhere. This gives you in a sense. Can we imagine for a moment, bureaucrats in Moscow and Petersburg, wherever, sitting and planning all of this. You know, as of course the Nazis did. If I remember correctly, there were 44,000 concentration camps during the Nazi period. Now these are the known camps that have been put together on one map of the Gulag. This is the Gulag. This is the Gulag archipelago in a bloodstain image of Russia. And all around, we, this is, these are the camps. As I say, the known ones. So what happens in all of this here? Just to imagine. Planning. Transportation. You've got to organise. You've got to organise the offices to go there. The guards. You've got to organise equipment, at least home and housing for the guards. Families, what do they do? Do you have anything? Schools for them, don't you? Do you have railways, roads, you know. Can you imagine all the logistics that go into this as well as the actual camps and the sheer numbers. The sheer numbers. And I'm not going to keep comparing it to the Nazi era because we know that very well, but we can imagine the obsession with government bureaucrats. Thousands and thousands of them planning, organising, implementing all of this from the logistics to the actual arrests, to the individuals, to, you know, to KGB going, taking 'em out of their home, their family, everything. Just imagine for a moment if we can. Everything that is involved in running a state of absolute terror. So the, this year... Some of the facts of the Gulag. Imprisoned a hundred thousand

up to the late twenties. 1917, of course the Russian Revolution. By 1936, the Gulag held 5 million prisoners. 5 million. 10 million were sent to the camps between 1934 and 1947 alone. And they're fighting a war against the Nazis. They're fighting a whole massive war. But 10 million are still sent to the camps in that period. I mean, it's an, if you just try to, we imagine, again, you know, the sophistication, which is often underestimated, I think, of this entire organised endeavour, if you like. And what it requires on behalf of a state and the minds of bureaucrats to be able to do this. The perpetrators, not only the victims. The deaths in the Gulag are estimate between 1918 and 53, estimated between 1.2 and 1.7 million. Who? Of course it was the rich. There were peasants who resisted being arrested during collectivization. The purged party members, military officers, German prisoners of war, members of ethnic groups who were labelled disloyal, of course, including Jews, Soviet soldiers who'd been taken prisoner during the war by the Germans, or used as slaves by the Germans. Huge numbers of them were sent to these camps as well cuz as Stalin and the others said, "Well, how can we trust him? They've been under the influence of the Germans." And then of course, dissident intellectuals of many, many ilk, many, many, many, many backgrounds, ordinary criminals, and of course, by far the majority utterly innocent of anything. 10 million in that one period.

A phrase which I've never forgotten reading many years ago from Stalin, "One death is a tragedy. A million deaths is merely a statistic." That's an accurate quote from Stalin. I'll leave you. We can all get the mind of somebody who can not only think that, he's not thinking it from a literary point of view, but from a realistic, you know, implement policy, implementation point of view. Okay. I want you to, just a couple of the key phrases from the book. This is one that really has stood out for me hugely. "The line separating good and evil runs not between states, not between classes, not between parties. It runs through the heart in each and every one of us. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" It's an amazing understanding of Solzhenitsyn. Not only coming out of the rage and anger of what happened to in his own life, but trying to understand what is the good in you. How does it really function in the human soul? Yes. Not only between states, not only, it's in every one of us. The human heart. Ultimately, this is part of, one of his conclusions in the book. And who wants to destroy a piece of their own heart? I mean, there's an ironic twist of humour. There's a strange play with words, but it throws it back on us as only a really good writer can do. And I think something very powerful in that little phrase. This goes to the core there of, deeper than everything I've mentioned of the histories and the testimonies and so on. He's trying to really get to the grips of the heart of darkness in every human soul. And he sees it in all of us. Not only the victim or the perpetrator. This is a chapter from, a little bit from chapter four, which obviously I love because it's, you know, he's linking Macbeth and, you know, et cetera. But it's a very powerful idea, which is also at the heart of what he's trying to

understand. What drives people to organise, do this, and carry it out. What drives the perpetrators, you know, to, he's trying to understand in his own way and his cause, of course, his references are literary, not only social theories. "Macbeth's self justifications were feeble. His conscience devoured him. Yes, even Iago was a little lamb. The imagination of Shakespeare's evil doers stopped short at a dozen corpses." It's, there's a twist of wit. There's an irony here because how you going to show, you know, a hundred people dead on stage. It's not film. So even Iago, Iago regarded as one of the most, you know, greatest of Shakespeare's villains or the evil characters, you know. Iago, you know, driven by desire to destroy and, you know, not only Othello but Desdemona and as many people in his path. For me, because he didn't get promotion. Othello got the promotion to be a general. But let's look at it again. His conscience devours Macbeth. As Lady Macbeth says, you're too full of the milk of human kindness. You know, he would be much more of a man if you could come on, get up, go do it, kill the king, kill the kids, kill banquet, et cetera. Because they had no ideologies. So this is fascinating. He talks about Macbeth and Iago are driven by power or jealousy or "vaulting ambition" to quote Macbeth. But because they had no ideology, ideology is what gives evil doing its justification and gives the evil doer the belief. You cannot do evil unless you believe in something. This is in the book at the heart of it for me, of the, if you like, the more philosophical or conceptual, the concept at the heart of the book. They have to have ideology. They have to believe in something to carry out such horror, terror, and murder on such a mass scale. They must believe in something. There can't be individual killers who just want to become the king. Kill others to do it. Or, you know, get revenge on, you know, because this guy gets promoted to be a general, a fellow and I don't, I'm Iago. Where there's ideology, there's a belief system, and it could be religion, it could be a political ideology, Marxism, whatever it is, it's ideology. What is ideology? in Alta's great phrase, "It's simply the set of beliefs and ideas which are dominant in a society at a given time in history." How are they dominant? Well, it may be a combination of mass media. It may be economic system, a political system, social ideas, or form. It's the dominant beliefs and ideas. That's it. Dominant ideas. Because they had no ideology. And once you have a belief, then you can do it on such a mass scale because you never feel guilty or shamed. You feel you've, you're doing the right thing. You believe in it. That is the social theory, which helps to make his act seem good in his eyes 'cause of course, the evildoer never thinks I'm doing evil except Richard the third. He's honest and says, "If I cannot prove to be a lover, I will prove to be a villain." But he's got irony and wit. Thank God. Think of how the agents of the inquisition fortified their wills. Look at that language. Fortify their will, not just carry it out, but fortified their wills. Got the determination, the belief, to do what they did by invoking Christianity. The conquerors of foreign lands by extolling the grandeur of the motherland. Whoever the colonisers were, the colonisers by civilization. Livingston's great



phrase about English colonisation. It's the three Cs. Commerce, Christianity and Civilise the native. Commerce, Christianity, and Civilization, the three great Cs that he said were, Livingston understood that the English would take out to colonise the world. The Nazis, by race. Without ideology, there would've been no Archipelago. For me, this idea is understanding, which I agree with. This insight goes to the core of how you can achieve the Gulag on such a mass scale as opposed to the more individual scale of, you know, the terrible leaders. Imaginatively, of course, the Macbeths and others. And he's using, of course, this as allegorical example here. So this chapter four for me captures a large part of the essence together with trying to understand how the human heart is split between, you know, not only class, not only parties, not only this between nations or states, but is in the human heart.

Okay. A couple of key phrases from the book. "Unlimited power in the hands of limited people always leads to cruelty." I love that way of putting it. You know, we talk about the mediocre people we work with. We know this, that, et cetera. But let's not underestimate when limited or mediocrity has unlimited power, it leads to their cruelty. This is Solzhenitsyn's idea. "Political genius lies in extracting success from other people's ruin." In the old Chinese cookie, if I may say that. In the old Chinese phrase, you know, "Every crisis is an opportunity." You know, extract success from other people's, you know, disaster. "We didn't love freedom enough." This is a quote where he talks about there's so many who were arrested from St. Petersburg at one period. So many. But what if those had just gotten together? The idea of, of course, you know, stand up together. In numbers, you can take on, you know, autocracy. The amount individuals can do is very little or totalitarianism in this case. And he tries to come to an understanding why did people not at least get together and fight, even if it was only with pickaxes or with knives and forks or whatever. Why didn't they try and band together and fight it? Was it because we didn't love freedom enough? This is so resonant for us today, I think, which is why I've taken out some of these quotes, all of these phrases. "Let the lie come into the world, let it even triumph. But not through me." It's an extraordinary phrase. That to me sums up also a huge part of the book. And he uses a similar phrase in "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich". "Do not rejoice when you have found, do not weep when you have lost." The old stoic equanimity. Okay, the old stoic approach. You know, it's almost a bit like the poem. If, you know, do not rejoice, do not weep. You know, everything will balance. "Our envy of others devours us most of all." It's fascinating. I think it Warren Buffett or was it Charlie Munger? One of them said they thought envy was the most powerful human emotion. Wealth. Solzhenitsyn puts it in his book. "Our envy of others devours us most of all." He sees it at the call. Okay, so these are some of the main... I've taken these phrases 'cause I think it speaks to us today. And also because for me, it highlights some of the main ideas in this remarkable three volume book. He looks at the Soviet state, the police state. He

compares it to the Russian Empire of the Romanovs. You know, the, obviously the key, the switch is obviously after the post revolution. He also asserts that Imperial Russia did not censor the literature nearly to the extreme as the Soviets. He asserts that political prisoners were not forced into labour camps under the Tsar. Other things, but not that. And the number per ratio of the population of political prisoners was far less than after the 1917 revolution. Later in his writing, the book "Russia in Collapse", 1998, Solzhenitsyn, he saw immediately the role of oligarchs. And he heavily criticised. 1998. What he saw is what's become known as the mafia state or state captured by the oligarchs. And they're linked to political power in the new Russia. He has a fantastic question area where he asks, "Can my society rediscover its sanity?" He sees it as being caught up in an absolutely insane, horrific period. Cannot rediscover some sanity. That implies that it had sanity before under the Tsars, which I think can be criticised a bit of a nostalgic fantasy. Solzhenitsyn, he refused in 1998 to accept Russia's Highest Order. Of course, this is 98, after the war. You know, they want to reward him. The order of St. Andrews. He said no. And he said, he gave the reason. "We are exiting communism in a most unfortunate way." Subtle but accurate. He also went on. "The elder generation in communist countries is not yet ready for repentance." So it's the influence of Christian, the Christian, the Russian Christian Orthodox Church in Solzhenitsyn in Tolstoy, in all the other, you know, which he's inheriting from the 19th century writers. The book, in 2009, Russian schools made it compulsory reading. "The Gulag Archipelago". And Putin, in 9, in 2009, Vladimir Putin said the book is much needed. The Russian Ministry of Education in 2009 said the book showed, I'm quoting, "Vital historical and cultural heritage on the course of 20th century history." So they can put it into the 20th century. This is history. This is the past. We are now, you know, the future and the new. So it's a fascinating way of shifting, you know, towards the image of a democratic Russia to come. Doris Lessing, interestingly, she wrote a whole, a really interesting article. But anyway, the essence of it is one book brought down an empire. Well, I think it's a bit going bit far. I don't think one book can do this, you know, any one book. But it's fascinating that someone like Doris Lessing, pretty fantastic sober writer, can say that. Isaiah Berlin wrote, "Until the book, the communists had persuaded their followers that denunciations of the regime were bourgeois propaganda. Until the book, communists had persuaded their followers that denunciations of the regime were bourgeois propaganda." So Isaiah Berlin, remarkable thinker and writer, he also puts the book as something as capable of bringing down, or the at least changing the, hugely the mindset of the Russians people.

Okay, I want to move on to the next one, which is the "Two Centuries Together", the history of Russian-Jewish relationships from 1795 to 1995, in effect. Solzhenitsyn, "Two Hundred Years Together". Now, this is an extraordinary book for me because it hasn't been fully published in English. You can get a PDF copy of about 70% with all sorts of

commentary by various translators in English. It's been translated into other languages, but not English. I'm not going to get into that debate. Another whole session. But here... And he tries to look at, and he researched an incredible amount, like a real detailed historian. Looking at 200 years going up to the present time virtually, towards the end of the 20th century. 200 years of Imperial Russia and relationship with Jewish people. And then post 1917 Revolution and Jews in Russia. And he's trying to understand the nuances, the essence of what is this relationship. What is the connection or disconnect between Russian and Jewish, if there is such a thing. Let's never forget. Around the time of the Russian Revolution, 1917, maximum maybe 4% of the population is Jewish. I mean, it's, you know, if you think about it, it is so tiny. And yet, why is it such a huge obsession? Well, Tudy and others are far more, are brilliant and able to explain it far better than me. I'm looking at it here in terms of the writer and the artist understanding and trying to get to grapples with it because he's not a historian. He's a writer, but he's trying to bring in this way of fictionalised history all of this together again. So, seldom that I've read a book with so much phenomenal, detailed research. Again, the same approach as the Gulag. Personal letters, personal writings, mass historical events, interviews with people, his own experience in the camps, inmates, Jewish and other, in the camps and out of the camps. All of it put together under this broad umbrella of what we call this genre of writing, fictionalised history. And how many other writers who've gone through what he went through would actually be fascinated and obsessed enough to take on a topic like this and want to try and understand. Yes, he's been very criticised with being antisemitic, but I'm going to debate that he's not. It's a debate. He's trying to understand through nuance and understanding in all these ways, combining the personal, the political, the factual, and the imaginative, the mythical, and the real. Trying to understand some nuance between these two. Now the part that, which has been accused of being antisemitic, and there are a number of them, of course, is that he singles out this guy, Naftaly Frenkel, who's on the far right in the picture. He was the head of one of the main Gulags in the White Sea, the Baltic Canal works in 1932. Jewish. And he was part of the leading, you know, the NKBD, what, et cetera at the time. And he was regarded as one of the big organisers of the Gulag and other, et cetera, et cetera. And Solzhenitsyn, he was identified as a Turkish Jew. Did he play such a major role in the organisation? Didn't he? Does it matter that he's Jewish? Should it matter? Is it ridiculous? Is any Christian being told because you were a Christian Russian and you helped organise the Gulag as one of part of many thousands and thousands of bureaucrats doing it? I mean, of course not. So why single out if, you know, if you, the Jews, of course, was he the so-called nerve of the Archipelago? There's evidence that, you know, that he does mention it, Solzhenitsyn. We have to be honest. And been accused of serious antisemitism. But we also cannot forget that this book that he wrote about the Jews was heavily censored by the KGB and heavily edited and

changed before being published in Russian at the time. So this is depicted, I wanted to give you just one example of a visual where they were obsessed, Solzhenitsyn and many others, to take one Jew as an example. And of course there are many others. The Trotskys and, you know, so many others, you know, of a tiny percentage and make them out to be, you know, the monster in the dark, you know, the dragon, the archetypal myth of the evil. You know, we all know at the Shylock only too well.

Where I think, what is he really trying to do in the book? This is what he, this is early on in the book. "We have to talk about the Jewish question." Well, why do we have to? 4%, the Jewish question? You know, the actual phrase, is it antisemitic because it harks back to the Nazi period? Of course, you can't use that phrase without thinking about it. "Not in a hush, but clearly." We shouldn't, "We should do so aware of both the suffering of the Jewish world history and centuries of Russian history, also full of suffering. The mutual prejudices must be faced." He has, I think perhaps we can accuse him of being naive, but he has I think, a sincere desire when you read the whole thing. I've managed to read, you know, you can get 70% of it in English and I've read a little bit of it in the German. My German is not quite good enough. Anyway, so this is the key. I think there's a sincere attempt to really understand what is it that the Russians have to demonise the Jews so much. And the few Jews involved with Lenin. The Jews may be involved with the Gulags. Of course, there were some Jews. Well, as they were with many, many others. Everybody. He's obsessed and fascinated. Why were the Jews so demonised and taken out? And of course he's not Jewish. So we have to see it always from that perspective. You know, the mark of a great writer is can you project yourself into the mind of another person? Cuz then you might be able to create a character without judging and you can have characters in novels and plays. So he's trying to project as a writer into the mind, what is it in Russian consciousness that he locates the Jewish, Jews and Jewish, you know, people. He links it through suffering. Understands the suffering of Jews and the suffering of Russians. Now that he links it and he gets it. But it's also the flaw in the argument because he then goes on to argue later in the book that's, well, Jews didn't suffer as much under the rule of the Tsars from the rule of the nobles and the aristocratic rule under empire up until 1917. You know, there's the pogroms and all that came from underneath, not only from on top. And there's been heavily criticised by many academics, scholars, historians for being antisemitic. Where he gets into it is after 1917 where he talks about, well, why were the Russians and the communists so obsessed to demonise the Jews so much. Of course, very useful scapegoat. Of course we know the other side, you know, the Russian Christian, all of that, you know, is taken for granted, but he's trying to get inside it from a Russian writer perspective. And that atrocities are committed both ways and suffering both ways. But in trying to equalise, I think it minimises that these are a tiny little percentage of the paid people. And also does it? Who

cares? You know, totalitarianism is totalitarianism. This extreme brutality and evil is being perpetrated on the by far the masses, by a small group who believe in the communist ideal and in the totalitarian state.

So I think he misses the point of even trying to get the essence of why take out the, why pull out the Jews for specific research when, you know, you're not going to say it's, you know, this was a Christian communist who killed whatever, or who ran this camp, et cetera, et cetera. There isn't the preface of religion where a Christian or whatever the religion, or often even nationality. Why the Jew? So he's caught up in the whole 20th century attitude of demonising the Jews. No question. But it's more subtle than that, the book. Cuz he's trying to really get to grips with why did the Russians even do that? Why did they choose the Jews to demonise? Why did they choose to take out, you know, some of the leaders of the Revolution and, you know, make the Jewish ones seem much more evil if you like. Why even take out the picture of Franco? Why, et cetera, et cetera. We can go on and on. So he is part of it, but he also is trying to understand why is it happening? And that's a level of questioning that I think many, many scholars and writers don't get to. They get stuck in their own ideological persuasion. Solzhenitsyn, to go back to the Gulag, can dig beneath ideology to understand, but of course ideology is used to justify and give faith and determination. But then why the Jews? The fantastic Jewish-American historian, guy called Richard Pipes, he wrote about this. "Every culture has its own brand of antisemitism. In Solzhenitsyn's case, in this book. It's not racial. It has nothing to do with blood. He's certainly not a racist. The question is fundamentally religious and cultural. He's similar to Dostoevsky, who was a fervent Christian, patriot, and an antisemite." Elie Wiesel disagreed with Richard Pipes. Solzhenitsyn, he argued, I'm quoting, "Was too intelligent, too honest, too courageous, too great a writer to be an antisemite." And in fact, in 1998, in his book, "Russia in Collapse", Solzhenitsyn criticised the Russian far right and right's obsession, as he called it, "the obsession", quote, with antisemitic conspiracy theories. This is 1998. Solzhenitsyn is using the word conspiracy, which is used in the Gulag of the lie and the conspiracy that comes through the lie and how that permeates an entire culture. So they believe in it or they're too scared to stand up against it. In the book, he also, he calls for Russian gentiles and Jews share responsibility for what happened. And he does downplay the number of victims in an 1882 pogrom in the Beilis Affair, which was a 1911 trial in Kyiv, where a Jew was accused of ritually murdering Christian children. So he plays down the role of the Tsar and the Russian aristocracy in the pogroms pre-revolution. And he plays down the role of this trial. You know, there are aspects which are clearly antisemitic or if we're kinder to him, neglect, but also antisemitic. What did happen was that he said manuscripts of this book and many other things he'd written had been stolen or taken by the KGB and constantly modified to add in antisemitic phrases and to appear much

more antisemitic. Can't prove it or disprove it. Can't find hard evidence, you know, either way. In the... So anyway, the first volume of the book looks at the first period of empire. And the second one, as I've said, is post the Russian revolution. Then fascinatingly gets onto the Six Day War and the extraordinary change that happens obviously in what he understands or sees as Soviet Jews. So he moves away from the blame game, the demonising game, you know, because there were some Jews with Trotsky and others, et cetera. Part of the Russian revolution. Part of this, that, the police, whatever else, et cetera, and extraordinary, you know, scientists and so on. He moves away from the blame game and he observes a resurgence of Jewish nationalism, of Jewish self-pride and belief. The Six Day War and the effect it has in Russia and obviously every, many, many other places in the world. But I'm just focusing on Solzhenitsyn. He gets the assimilationist debate because he sees the change and he starts to understand because Russia wasn't sure whether to assimilate with the West and the value, cultural values of the West and the values of the enlightenment, human rights, justice, democracy, freedom, et cetera, or, you know, stick with more the kind of whatever it is, a Russian-Slavic identity, et cetera. So assimilate or not to assimilate. He gets it in relation to, he understands the horns of the assimilationist debate for Jewish people. In Hanna Aaron's great phrase, you know, the Pavano, the upstart made good in the new country or the pariah is always going to be seen as a pariah in the inverted, the host nation. You know, in Hannah Aaron's great remarkable book on the origins of totalitarianism. So he says it's ridiculous to blame the Jews for the Russian revolution. It was the Russian failings that determined our historical decline. He called it at the end of chapter nine in this book. He has this wonderful, this phrase, "It's a superstitious faith in the potency of conspiracies and lies that perpetuates the blaming of the Russian Revolution on the Jews." It is scandal, I'm quoting again, "It is scandalous. It is unpardonable in action that prevented the Tsarist state from protecting the Jews and even the communist state from protecting the Jews." So he is understanding the nuance of both sides of the coin. And that's why I think he is different from just being the obvious antisemite, if you like. In chapter 15, he does write, "Yes, the Jews, some of the Jews were revolutionary cutthroats, but so were the Russians. So were the Christians." And he goes on and on to list a whole lot of others. He calls for repentance and that the Russians must repent. I'm quoting, "Russians must repent. And the Tsarists and communists period for pogroms, for merciless attacks, murders, and killings of Jews." He always tries to show both sides of the coin, but is ultimately, possibly caught in the 19th into the 20th century overall perception of the Jew, as you know, the outsider demon or at least the outsider threat, if you like.

Going back to Richard Pipes from Harvard, historian. Quote, "The book is an effort to show empathy for both sides." And I think that captures it. I think Pipes gets it. Both to ex, and I'm quoting. This is from Pipes. "To exonerate Jews for also responsibility for the

revolution and the communist period afterwards." But he writes, and I think he's accurate, Pipes, that Solzhenitsyn is too eager to exonerate Tsarist Russia of mistreating its Jewish subjects and as a consequence, he is insensitive to the Jewish predicament. In his opinion, in Pipes' opinion for me, the book absolves Solzhenitsyn of the taint of antisemitism. But he, but Pipes understands that Solzhenitsyn's nationalism, and that's the key, prevents him from really understanding the Jewish position and situation. And he talks about the nationalism and I think that hits the nail on the head. That as the nationalism comes in, and it's interesting because his idea is different from religion and deicide. His idea is nationalism is what prevents Solzhenitsyn to understanding ultimately the position of the Jew in any of these countries of Europe or Russia for that matter. And as a result, this is Pipes' writing. "He cannot see the poisonous atmosphere in which Jewish people lurk for generations in the Russian Empire, under the Russian Orthodox Church and nationalist times." And then in Solzhenitsyn, it's nationalism, not only, obviously the evil of communism, because it is a nostalgic sense of, trying, if you're trying to find an identity for a nation, you're going to always rub up against nationalism. And what do you do? You take it onto a profound deep level or do you take it on partly? Does it work if it's only part? I'm not so sure. Anyway, there are many others, debates and scholars who've argued this way and that way. Interesting One is John Clear, who is a historian at University College in London who talks about the charge of antisemitism in the book are misguided in Clear's phrase, but at the same time writes, you know, that Solzhenitsyn is far more concerned with exonerating the Russian people than with the suffering under the pogroms under the Tsarist period. Because he has a nostalgia to Russian nationalism during the Tolstoy, the Tsarist period, he's hawking back to find an identity somewhere because he's a Russian writer, not an international writer. He's harking back to try and find something somewhere in the past and he's going to therefore rub up against Russian nationalism. And for me it's, this speaks so strongly to contemporary times, because for me, through the right at the moment, nationalism is what is really threatening democracy. Of course, as we know, political correctness coming from the left is threatening education. So there's a mixed reception of all of this. And, but Solzhenitsyn fascinatingly, you know, he's trying to get to grips with all these nuances to the point where a lot of these scholars are writing and trying to understand. And I think it helps enrich our knowledge of these old debates and give us far more nuanced answers. Solzhenitsyn writes, "I'm not an anti-Semite, but I am a Russian Slav." And this goes back to it. You know, when you put that nationalist word first, I am this da da da. I'm not a writer or an artist. I'm a Russian Slav writer. That's the difference. And that's what I'm trying to say. He talks about my people, my language, my speech, you know. He said, and he's honest, he says, "Perhaps it's just because I feel more comfortable with the Russian Slav, but I respect the Jew, the Pol." You know, very patronisingly. "In the multi-ethnic Russia, the Jew and the Pol and the Tartar have a same

right to Russia as I do. Russia is our collective mother." And this goes way back to Tolstoy and all the others. They're imbued with this obsession with the motherland, the fatherland, whatever one you use. Nationalism again, rears its ugly head. You know, in Breath's great phrase. You know, I'll come back to it. Which is, it's on heat yet again. You know, German nationalism. You know, Russian nationalism, et cetera.

One last point that I want to mention is... He fascinatingly goes into Jewish history. And I just want to put this here, where he talked about how is it that the Jews have survived for so long? What is the role of nationalism in Jewish survival in Jewish history and the fact that they've had to be outsiders and they've been treated so appallingly and so cruelly. He goes into this in great detail. That's why perhaps and others are far more nuanced in their criticism and not calling him an antisemite. And he goes into this, you know, how is it that Jews have survived for so long? And what's interesting for me is that he's genuinely trying to come in as a writer, and not Jewish obviously, you know, to try and understand it from his perspective. And he poses the question, you know, how, what is the role that exile has done? What is the role that being an outsider, what is the role that being demonised, being hated, being disliked, to put it mildly, has played in the very survival of Jews themselves? He's trying to understand it from the outside. Mark Twain has a fascinating bit as well, but I don't have time to get into that now. And he talks about, you know, after the Six Day War and the war-like invincible Jewish image and the inferiority complex of the Serbian Jews went. You know, and they cease whispering and began to speak, allowed and demanded to be released to Israel. The Jews jury was trapped in the melting pot of the despotic Stalinist empire. And yet suddenly after the war, after the Six Day War, the Zionist movement was reborn and the ancient Moses appealed trumpeted again. Let my people go. So it's, I mean, he's a writer, so he's got to be a melodramatic and he's going to be, you know, metaphoric and so on. Quotes from the Bible and elsewhere. But we come back to what I started with is the assimilationist debate amongst Russian identity and looking at Western Europe and Russia, understand, he gets it. The assimilationist debate with Jews in Russia and out of Russia. And that perhaps did the, what is the role of, he talks about it in the book, what is the role of the Jewish diaspora in helping or hindering survival of the Jewish nation as he calls it in the book. Was the Jewish nation preserved in spite of its exile, forced from the tragedy of AD 70 revolt in Jerusalem, or did it save the people? He puts a whole lot of questions in the book. Was the Jewish nation preserved because of it or in spite of it? Where does that instinct for national self-preservation come from is the irony of the irony with the diaspora. And he ends up looking at the Bible. I will scatter you among the nations. Leviticus 26:33. "Yaveh will scatter you among the peoples and you shall be left few in number among the nations." Deuteronomy 4:27. So anyway, besides these quotes, what I do you want to give him at the end is the full credit for



being, for so exhaustingly researching 200 years of this history, trying to get a more nuanced understanding. Yes, he is ultimately a man of his times. He's caught up in the 20th century attitude overall from Europe and Russia towards Jews. But he tries to dig deeper than what he understood in the Gulag, in "The Gulag Archipelago". It's the ideology that enables millions to perpetrate murder and mass murder on millions and millions and millions of others. He, and trying to understand the idea of assimilation, but from his own experiential point of view. I think it enriches the overall debate of assimilation in the Jewish identity. It's for everybody to make their own decision. So thank you very much everybody. And sorry that I've gone on a little bit. Got carried away.

## Q & A and Comments

From Michael,

Q: Why no mention of Boris Pasternak?

A: Oh great. Another, you know, brilliant writer and the film as well. Sure.

– Dennis. A dozen years earlier, the authorities forced past an actor to refuse the 58 Nobel Prize. Absolutely. An amazing writer.

– Bobby. If he was mixing fact and fiction, how do you know which is which? For example, the testimony of prisoners and his own experience could have been fictionalised to some extent. Bobby, you're absolutely right. And the strictest, the historians would say, "Look. Fact is fact. Fiction is fiction." But in the 20th century and before, I mean, did the Trojan War ever really happen? Homer's Odyssey. We don't really know. We can't prove it ultimately. And yet it's an amazing poem of Homer. Did, come jumping up to the 20th century, did so many of these things happen? Yes, of course they did. But it has become a huge literary genre. This idea of fiction and history fiction or fictionalising history. We see it in film all the time. I mean, so many movies take historical events, historical characters, and it's fiction 'cause at the end, it's a 90 minute film or it's a novel or book of 2, 300 pages and it's told as a story. It's edited. It's cut. It's all the rest of it. You know, to get the dramatic sequence of events. To get the drama of it, you know. And much of it is left out. So, you know, the notion of autobiography, the notion of purely historical fact, these boundaries are blurred in this genre of writing. It can be that it's fictionalised, of course. And we don't know exactly which is which. I would argue for it because I think it enriches literature and it enriches the emotional experience of far more readers than those who might not want to only read a historical account. But of course, again, it's a debate between the two and it's a pretty fierce debate between historians and literary people at the

moment.

– Paula, thanks. When I used to teach one day, emphasised my students that are just one day and had to imagine eight years of each day. Yep. It's a fantastic point. Thank you.

– It's just one day in the life of Ivan Denisovich. Not eight years. Tanya.

Q: Do you see any parallel with Primo Levi?

A: Yes. Writing about it. Yeah, I think because it's, again, it's testimonial and it's witness writing or coming from the position of witness and testimony and memory. There's another whole genre which is memory in literature. You know, not autobiography, but memory because memory itself is not necessarily autobiography. Autobiography is much more concerned with historical facts of a person's life. But memory is very different. As we all know, our memories jump. You know, exaggerate things, minimise things, change, et cetera. So memory is moving more towards the fictionalised history, if you like. It's become, again with Primo, you know, I can't say how much is exact fact and exactly not, but I think it, he is part of it, you know, part of this genre of writing in literature. Because Primo is not, it's not, he's not only seen as an historian, but a remarkable writer, a great writer, you know, and the periodic tables and so on, no doubt. Because I think you have to crystallise space and time in a novel and in a play and a movie. In autobiography and factual writing, you don't.

– Janet, please repeat. Oh, Stalin's quote. Yes. Stalin. "One death is a tragedy. A million deaths is a mere statistics."

– Mona. You're describing Trump. No, I'm not trying to. You can make that connection in a fictionalised historical way. You can make that literary connection.

– Happy. Okay. Tatian. Where the Polish murder 80, 85 is asking the Polish officers who murdered. Yeah, but he doesn't go into it in this year or in the Gulag book.

– Romaine. Thank you. What would, Solzhenitsyn is the moral centre of his writing, beyond writing and survival. As if that's not enough. I think that he would see, you know, that quote I mentioned about the lie, that let the lie happen. Let even majority believe in the lie, but don't let the lie happen through me. And I think he tries to hold on true to that. That's my feeling. And this idea I mentioned about ideology and this idea about getting to the human heart, you know, and who wants to cut off off their heart, you know. He's constantly is trying to understand all sides of the same picture. Not only the goodies and the baddies, you know, that kind of Hollywood cowboy movie.

- Margaret. Chapter four really does explain so clearly reasons for the horrors committed by the evil jurors, the mass murderers. Yeah, I think he gets it cuz he makes that distinction between the individual who's doing it for ambition, Macbeth, or revenge, or jealousy, Iago, which is why I think he uses those characters. But that's individual. That's not a mass ideological belief, which can be believed in by huge number. So they never feel they're doing wrong. They feel they're doing right, which gives them the belief and the tenacity and the determination to do it and carry it out. He would also argue that when that ideological belief goes is when it becomes much harder for these people to carry out the evil. I remember being in the South African army, and I remember meeting this one white commandant and he said to me, "I'm not going to die for an apartheid bench in a park." And in that moment I knew apartheid would end and it suddenly hit me. And I don't want to equate this to apartheid at all. I'm just giving a very personal experience of something when it suddenly hit me that if a commandant is thinking that, he knows apartheid is over at some point.

- Romaine. Melanie Klein who envy is a core defining emotion long before Warren Buffett. I agree and I love Melanie Klein and object relations theory. It's brilliant. And her book, "Envy and Gratitude", masterpiece. Thanks Romaine.

- Susan. I wonder if Putin would think the same way about the book today. Certainly not.

- Margaret. Thank you. Ruth. Okay. Political correctness. Well you can take me on on that, but I think political correctness is certainly threatening the free flow of debate and education in certain areas of the West and I think that comes from the West and the left and I think from the right, it's nationalism.

- You know, as we talk about, how is democracy being threatened in these countries? Well, I think these are examples because they don't tolerate dissent. They don't tolerate alternative views.

- Millie, "My father was imprisoned in a slave camp near the Arctic Circle." Wow. "99% death rate and suffered with terrible health and early death, but he survived the Nazis." Thank you, Millie. That's extraordinary. That's an extraordinary sharing and I really do appreciate.

- William,

Q: "What, if anything, was his view on Zionism?"

A: Fascinatingly, Solzhenitsyn heavily attacked the Russian communist around the time of the 67 war and linking, because the, and the big change in the Soviet attitude towards Israel and Jewish people that in

his opinion happened certainly after the 67 war. They were furious with the Egyptians and others for losing it. But his view of Zionism was he hated the equation of Zionism and antisemitism, Israel and Jewish people. And in the book, he argues vehemently against that endless putting together of Zionism and racism and antisemite, all the rest of it, et cetera. And Zionism has nothing to do with it. Zionism is to be, you know, is an amazing achievement because of self-pride of Jewish revival, of Jewish self-belief, nationalism. He goes into it all and he is vehement against the link with that and racism and antisemitism. He sees it as as antisemitic. You know, he's totally pro-Zionism, basically.

– Susan, thank you. Neville. Hope you well, Neville.

Q: "Was he a schizophrenic?"

A: I don't think he was schizophrenic. I just think that going through the experience of being in the labour camp so young after, you know, he's fighting for the Red Army and he's a captain fighting the Nazis and he's a Marxist. He's a believer. If a couple of letters he get thrown into prison for eight years in a Siberian camp and he's going to be at least partly schizophrenic maybe or, but I think he's constantly, in the great Russian literary tradition from Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and all the other, he's imbued with questioning philosophical ideas. And that's in all the Russian literature. And it's not the same as in English language literature often. But philosophical ideas is part of a novel. Whether it's the narrator, the writer, or a character discussing philosophical ideas. You see it in Chekhov as well. Nationalism can be conflated with fascism. After all, it was the recognition of Jewish national aspirations that led to the creation of Israel and nationalism has a role in bringing nations together. Yeah. To fight extreme fascism in the second World War. Absolutely. So, absolutely. It depends on, I guess how far nationalism dictates identity or is part of it. You know, it's always a question of degree. As with all these things, I think. Whether it's nationalism, whether it's ethnic belief or religious belief. You know, it depends on how far it goes that no other viewpoint can be tolerated. There is only one way, my way, or no way.

– Natasha,

Q: "How do you assess the number? You mentioned 1.7 million dead in the Gulag."

A: I don't, are you asking to compare with 6 million in the Nazi camps? I think that's for another whole discussion. I don't think it's fair. Those camps were set up to exterminate. These Siberian camps were not set up to exterminate. They force labour. Horrific and the odds of dying, obviously massive and huge. But they're not fundamentally extermination camps of an entire people simply because

they're born, this not bad. The Gulag is primarily, if you are perceived to be slight weight against the state, the ideology of communism, you're sent. Horrific, but I don't want to equate it to in the slightest. For me, the holocaust is probably the most horrific and unique event in human history. And I think that is different to this.

– Melana,

Q: "Did Solzhenitsyn's wife Eleanor become a great supporter of the Jewish...?"

A: I dunno, I have to check that. Probably you mean his second wife? Yep. I'll check that.

– Thank you. Jane.

Q: "Any link between testimonial literature of Vessel and Solzhenitsyn?"

A: Well, there has been discussion. I mean, you know, Ellie Vessel's night, as I'm sure everyone knows, was I think in the beginning about 800 pages long, and then together with the help of Mariak and others, cut it radically. It's 120, 630 something pages, if I'm right. So how much has taken out, how much has kept in a, is there any fictionalised history in that? Is it's strictly historically factual? I think that's for another whole discussion, but testimonial literature involves this very debate and I think it's a very rich one. And I don't think in the anyone can be purist. Why? Because for a writer, they're dealing with memory. For a historian, they're dealing with historical facts. So it's a very different approach and I think both feed each other, you know, and I would treasure both. Absolutely.

– Rhonda. Were you able to see if... Okay, thank you. Oh, I have to sort check about Grossman. You're asking if he met Solzhenitsyn. Sorry, I'll have to check that, Rhonda.

– Thank you. Barbara. Thank you. Marion. Cherovsky worked with him on human rights. Yeah, I was going to quote a couple of phrases from Cherovsky here and Andrei Zakharov. He had an amazing relationship with Zakharov and Cherovsky and in the book, he quotes Jabotinsky. So Solzhenitsyn read Jabotinsky. How many Christian writers do we know have read, understood, and agree with Jabotinsky? There's a whole section in the book where he agrees with Jabotinsky. Okay.

– Ah, Paula, thank you. Elena Bono was Zakharov's wife, not Solzhenitsyn. Thank you. Dina. Thanks. Okay.

– So thank you very much everybody and hope you have a great and fun and debating full weekend.